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ABSTRACT

This report presents student-written statements about the college experience, and is intended to help student affairs practitioners and others in program development and evaluation adjust and refine programs to respond to changing student needs. During the 1996-97 academic year, 35 students at the University of Alabama were asked to write about their college experiences. The students ranged from first-year students who had just arrived on campus to seniors near graduation and included transfer students and non-traditional students. Their descriptions are in the form of letters about college life ranging from pledging a fraternity or sorority to searching for a job just before graduation. Equal numbers of students praise and criticize the University. Criticisms center mainly on support for students, beginning with freshmen orientation and continuing through delayed time to degree that is blamed on poor academic advising. The comments are reproduced verbatim, without editing or alteration. (JLS)

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The Contemporary College Student:

Students in their own Voices

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Abstract

As the college student population changes and evolves, student affairs practitioners and others in program development and evaluation have a responsibility to adjust and refine programs to adequately respond to student needs. The current report includes student-written statements about the college experience, ranging from pledging a fraternity or sorority to searching for a job just before graduation. A total of 35 students at The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa developed these responses to help guide meaningful discussions about how colleges respond to student needs.

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Introduction

College students are changing. From the numbers of students entering higher education institutions from single parent families to increased numbers of minority students, the composite student body is vastly different from what it was 20 years ago. As administrators and educators responsible for student success and learning, we must learn to appreciate and understand these differences, and to work to adapt our institutions to effectively meet these changing student needs.

During the 1996-1997 academic year, we asked a number of students to write about their college experiences. Our students ranged from first year students who had just arrived on campus to well-seasoned seniors weeks away from graduation. We believe that these "mini-papers," often which found their way to us in the forms of letters, provide a meaningful mechanism for understanding what scares, supports, and impacts college students. All of the students who responded to our request were enrolled at The University of Alabama, and equal numbers condemn and praise the institution. We have not altered or edited the student comments, and find that their syntax alone represents an area for fruitful discussion about the college experience.

Choosing a College and the First Year

1/ My name is Steve and I'm from Leighton, Alabama. I am a student-athlete at The University of Alabama. In high school, I really didn't have a clue as to where I would spend my college years. I was good at football and pretty good academically, so that gave me a choice to go just about anywhere in the country I wanted to go.

Finding the right school for me was not a very easy process. I wanted to attend a school that had a good tradition in both athletics and academics. From looking into different universities across the nation, I found that not very many of them had a name for both athletics and academics, so that narrowed my choices down a great deal. Of the schools that had both qualities, I narrowed my schools down to Tennessee, Alabama, Auburn, and Florida. Florida and Tennessee both were to far away from my home, so only Alabama and Auburn were left. Auburn was a nice place, but after I left their campus I didn't feel like I would be at home if I attended their school. Alabama, on the other hand, was very comfortable place and I felt like I belonged there. The University of Alabama had everything that I was looking for in a university. The campus was nice, but more importantly, the University had a very deep football tradition and the academics are outstanding as well. I knew that if I received a degree from Alabama, I would be able to get a job anywhere in the United States. I also knew that Alabama has a

good reputation for sending their football players into the NFL, which is something I would like for myself. Attending the University of Alabama will be a plus for me as far as being ready for the world when I get out there.

2/ Deciding on the choice of college was a very difficult decision. I knew that I wanted to go out of state (I'm from Dallas, Texas) just to experience a different setting. When I went to orientation I came with a friend from high school who was going to attend The University of Alabama. I got off the plane in Birmingham and made my way to Tuscaloosa and that's where the culture shock kicked in. Everyone had a Southern accent, which I wasn't used to.

I moved into Burke where I would had been living for the past few days. I didn't have a roommate and it was very scary. My friend from high school was separated from me, so I was by myself. I attended all of the daily functions and I met some girls who seemed nice. Well, I honestly just couldn't relate to any of them because they were all from small towns. It seemed like everywhere I turned, I saw girls with their parents. It was very hard for my parents to come down because I lived so far away. I called my Mom very upset and explaining to her that I didn't think this place was for me. I was sure that I was going to home for a semester and then go to another school. My Mom listened to me for awhile and felt bad that she was not here with me. As I hung up the phone, I went to a meeting with my Avanti

(orientation team leader) to help with schedules and just explain what was going to take place. I remember her asking everyone in the room their majors. People wanted Pre-med, Accounting, Teaching, etc. I had no clue what wanted. It was awful. After some of the functions, I went to my room. On the way there, I met this girl from Maryland. We started talking and then I met one of her friends. I finally realized that the University has lots of different people from everywhere. I'm now a Junior, and couldn't imagine myself anywhere else.

3/ The reasons I decided to attend The University of Alabama was a reason that I later found out that other people chose. Well, I graduated from high school in 1993. The reason that I chose this university was of course because of the football team had just won the national championship. Everybody in the U. S. was talking about how good the football team was how they won the championship.

A lot of my friends had chosen to attend other universities and wanted me to go with them. But my mind was set on the great University of Alabama. There was no turning back for me.

When I first got to the University of course I was scared. I was only seventeen. I had not been to a place as big as the University before. I was intimidated by the upperclassmen and the large classrooms. In high school, my largest class had 32 students. When I went to my first class at the University, it was biology class, it had over 200 people in the class. When I

walked in I felt that all eyes were on me. People could look at me and tell that I was a freshman. They recognized me as freshman because of the way I dressed and the way I looked. Coming out of high school I was dressing like a typical high school student. College dress was totally different. I thought everybody was dressing weird. But as the years progressed I began dressing the same way and it wasn't that weird after all. I found that I had to become adjusted to college life and I had to learn how to be college student and stop acting like a high school student.

4/ My freshman year I decided that I was going to try out for the track team. When I was chosen as potential track star, I thought that I was the best. Everybody envied me because I was a member of the "track team." I was so caught up into running track that my grades began to fall and I had to eventually stop running track. I later learned that I did not have to run track to be noticed by anyone on this campus. I just had to be myself. When I was running track I often tended to look down on the other freshman and I started associating with only upperclassmen. By doing so I failed my first semester in college and had to repeat two of my classes. To be recognized at any university by running track is an honor, but to be recognized by a university by having good grades is an even greater honor.

5/ I'm sitting here thinking back to when I started school, and I am reflecting back on why it will take me five years and two summer school sessions to graduate. The first thing that comes to mind is poor advising. Although I changed majors after my freshman year, it should not have made much difference. I should have been guided to take core classes.

When I came up to school for orientation I registered for core classes. I had a start in the right direction. My first semester took some getting used to. I pledged a sorority and was hundreds of miles from home. I only knew one person from my hometown. Socially I did well, although academically I did alright. I earned a 2.0. I was satisfied but wanted to do better.

When it came time to register for spring classes my advisor encouraged me to stay with 12 hours. I told him that I had a hard time with some of my classes so he encouraged me to take a full load of electives and a core class. He told me it would be a great opportunity to meet some of the football players. I had no idea it would delay my graduation; I thought as long I was in school passing classes, I was working towards a degree. Little did I know that the classes he recommended did not even meet the requirement for an elective. He was right on one account, I think I had the entire National Championship team in one class or another and I did get my Sports Illustrated signed a couple of times. In fact there was one boy who was on the team that I had every class with.

After that semester I changed majors. I still did not have any guidance. For a couple of semesters I just saw whichever advisor I wanted. Then, by the beginning of my Junior year, I had an advisor that I would keep for the rest of my college years. My advisor never mapped out my four, three, or two years left at school. He never told me that I had to take standardized tests to be let into my school. I have been advised to take over 19 hours when I do not have a 3.0 overall. I have also registered for classes that my advisor recommended to me while looking at my paperwork that I did not meet the prerequisite for. I had to drop the class after the first day and I could not pick up any other classes that I needed through drop/add. I was pretty much left in the dark until I paid attention to what my sorority sisters were doing.

I discovered that the older girls in my sorority would get their packets (with their advising materials) take them to the house and have someone in their major help them with their schedules. I did not even realize that I was going to be here five years until I was working on my schedule for the spring of my junior year. The problem had gotten so bad that my sorority has started to pair a younger girl up with an older girl in her major so that she will get some kind of guidance. I started being advised by friends because they are the ones that were eager to help. You are probably wondering where my advisors were during all of this time.

My advisors would either allot for a three hour free-for-all or you could sign up beside one of the times. The free-for-alls were nightmares. It would be a room of people shoving papers into an advisors face while one student desperately sat beside the advisor trying to get help between all of the interruptions. The other option is to sign up for a time. The times are in 15 minute increments. Advisors are always a good half an hour off. Because they were behind on their schedules, the advisors were irritated and ready to process you through the assembly line. How can you advise someone on four years of their life in 10 or 15 minutes? You just can't. As a student you get stressed and give up. You go with good intentions but leave with nothing resolved.

I'm sure you are asking how could we improve advising? The only solution I have come up with is to schedule advising for a longer period of time and allow students to meet with their advisors for 45 minutes. That way you may be able to have a conversation rather than "Sign this!" and "Will you send the next person in."

I am angry I am here for a financially unplanned year. I pay out-of-state tuition which adds to the cost. Once I start to think of an extra year of rent, bills, and transportation home it makes me furious. I think that if I had been properly advised through school then I would be graduating in a few months. The University should spend the same amount of time and energy advising students as they do recruiting them!

6/ The first year is very difficult, but at the same time is fun. When I first got here it was very difficult for me because I had to get used to a new country, new school, new friends, and a lot of other things. But since I am an athlete I think that it wasn't that hard, because being an athlete you get in contact with other athletes as soon as you get here, so you always have people to be with, especially teammates. On the other hand, it is very, very fun because the first year is when you start experiencing all the new things so you are always excited because everything is new to you and you want to learn about everything. It is also fun because you get to know a lot of new people and you start making new friends. Settling in is was not very easy. I had a lot of things to do and a lot of things to think about, it was hard being away from home and getting used to a new life, but like I said before, being an athlete helped me a lot because I was in contact with a lot of people very soon and people were making sure I was fine and that I didn't need anything.

The social scene is very interesting. In my case it was very easy to make friends because as soon as I got here I was with my teammates all day long so I had friends very soon. But I can imagine if I wouldn't be an athlete, it would be very hard for me to make friends, and I would probably be depressed for a long time, so I can say I was lucky that I am an athlete and that my social life is doing good.

Making the grade for me is the toughest part of the first year, especially being an athlete. It is very hard when you are away from home to be really concentrated in school, so the first couple of months were very difficult for me. Also, being an athlete makes it even harder because I am traveling so much that I am missing a lot of classes and it is very, very hard to catch up with the work.

Although the first year is very hard, I think it is fun and it is a very nice experience.

7/ My first year in college was the most difficult time in my life. It was not the fact that I was away from home, or that I was alone. The problem was that I was a 22 year old freshman. I had spent the four previous years in the United States Air Force. When I was in the process of choosing a college, I hardly even thought about it. I knew that the University had a very good business school so that was why I chose Alabama. The mere fact that I was older seemed to leave the rest (party life, surrounding area, etc.) unimportant to me. When I arrived at Alabama I lived in the University Housing. This was the cheapest way to live since I was from out of state. The people in the dorm were not bad, but the fact that I was four and even five years older than some, seemed to make me feel uncomfortable. I feel universities should all look at this issue and offer certain dorms or even floors in dorms to older students. When classes started, I found that the majority of my classes had a very wide

range of ages. This helped me feel that I wasn't alone in the struggle to be an older student. I managed to meet a lot of good friends, but this too led to some problems. I found that everyone always wanted to go out to the bars and drink all night. Since I knew when I was their age, I did the same thing, I never said anything about it. I found myself living like an 18 year old all over again. My grades have never been great and after my first semester at college I had a 2.0. After my first semester, I realized just how expensive it was to be in college. Since I was older, I never bothered my parents for money since I was receiving $400 a month from the G. I. Bill. Soon I began to wonder if I had made the right decision. Since I had never been a great student, but I loved to work, I started thinking that maybe I should have stayed in the Air Force. After a lot of thinking, I decided to stick it out and go for my degree. The second semester was a lot better. I decided to relax and just have fun. I figured even though I may be older, I can still enjoy college life. I began getting out more and just taking advantage of what the school and area had to offer. I guess you could say that I had finally settled in.

8/ The choice of the college I was going to came very easy to me. I knew I would be attending the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa since I was a freshman in high school. Sure I had options at other choices like Florida, Miami, etc., but since watching the Tide play football on TV, I knew I would come here.

I thought about going to Auburn too because they had a good engineering school, but in the end I made the better choice. A lot of my friends struggled in their senior year, thinking of a college to attend. Most of them didn't know until the last minute what college they would be attending in the fall. Some of them made the best choice and came to the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa also.

Settling in wasn't one of my problems. I seem to get along with everybody, I guess you can say I'm a people person. You do have doubts about who your roommate will be, what kind of person he is, are they crazy, and stuff like that. My roommate and I get along well. We haven't had an argument and that is because we respect each other's space. Settling in also has to do with the type of people you hang around with. If you hang around people who like the same things you like, then you tend to get along well with them. Sure you are going to have your problems every now and then, but that comes with the territory. After the first couple of weeks you pretty much develop a daily routine and you tend to stick to it. It only takes a couple of weeks to get situated and get in with the right crowd.

Making the grade is probably the biggest problem for most in-coming freshmen. A lot of the students are not used to all the freedom they get when the first come to college. They start staying out late, missing classes, and then that's when their grades start dropping. Most of my friends had this problem. Some of them are on probation for that reason. I didn't have

this problem. Sure I partied and all of that with them, but I also got my work done.

9/ I was never the type to plan when I was a high school student. There was nothing else that I really wanted to do so I enrolled myself in the college that automatically accepted me because of my ACT scores. It was easy and fun; all of my high school buddies were in my orientation class. But, reality soon hit and I knew there would be a problem. Totally unprepared for the college experience, I received my first bill for tuition and also had to purchase books. My Mom sent me to class on my first day with American Express travelers check to pay for books. From there, the mystery began.

Soon I knew in my heart how unprepared I was for college. Simple things like tests, taking notes and paying for school were as foreign to me as anything I'd ever known. No one in my family could have known how clueless I was. Fear of asking questions has always been a problem of mine. I'd perfected the art of looking like I knew what was going on around me. Again, I was deeply clueless.

Things went on like this for a long time. Unaccustomed to asking my parents for any money, I soon got jobs which paid enough to pay for school. It took me a long time to finally make my way over to the Financial Aid Office. The forms looked very scary. But, I would die first, then ask questions.

Job after job, year after year, school was just always there and it became more important to me and I still do not know why. All I do know is that I just kept working to pay for it. I never asked for money, help or anything.

10/ About three years ago, my Aunt and I were talking. I had just had an emotional couple of weeks with my father in Connecticut so my Aunt took me to the airport. She explained to me that her husband had a friend who had graduated from The University of Alabama and that it was rated as one of the top Communications schools in the country. She thought I should go there.

Well, The University of Alabama sounded a million miles and million dollars away. But, I needed a change. I was working full-time, attending classes at night full-time, and I needed a change. I did it. I applied and received my acceptance letter.

What motivated me must have been pure curiosity. I wanted to know what it would be like in Tuscaloosa. I never set foot here until I moved in two days before classes began. I had the same feeling again - clueless inside, confident outside.

Orientation was a good experience. I actually understood some things and was motivated to do well and ask questions. Next thing I knew, my classes had started and wow was my life different than ever before. I had no job, no friends, and all I had to do was attend classes. I soon fixed that.

I applied for the position of resident assistant and got the job. Next it became summer, I found another job with Housing and I was taking a full summer load. Since then, I have made similar moves in the job department. I acquired a work-study position in the computer lab and learned everything I could about software.

Here I am, 1 month from graduation, eight years of college, and battle scars to prove it. I have only two regrets. I wish I could have learned to ask questions a lot sooner. I probably go overboard now, but at least I'm no longer clueless. I also wish I would have come to the University of Alabama much sooner.

11/ I am from a small town, and graduated from a small school. Needless to say I knew everyone and everyone knew me. I was never without some one to talk to. During the school year all of my classmates and I aspired to go to college. Some were going to Auburn, some to Jacksonville, and many to Alabama. We were all going to remain friends and have a great time in the college life. Yet for some unforseen reason, after graduation I was the only one packing my bags for Alabama. Everyone else stayed home and went to UAB (University of Alabama-Birmingham). This did bother me some but I shrugged it off. I thought "I'm a nice person, everyone will like me."

Summer flew by, and the time came to trek off to Freshman Orientation. I had hoped for this to be the wonderful starting point of my college career. I just knew that I would meet so

many new people and have such a good time, that I would never want it to end. Well I had a rude awakening.

First day the Freshman Class was herded into a big auditorium and was told what was going to happen for the day and the next. As I looked around the room fear struck the very bottom of my soul. I knew absolutely no one. Out of five hundred high school graduates, I saw not one familiar face. I began to wonder: Will the rest of my college career be like this? I could not listen to the speaker because of this thought. Me, all alone taking on the massive University of Alabama (I know I am over dramatizing the situation a bit, but this how I felt). While my imagination played havoc with my mind, everyone else heard the speakers instructions and started to leave the building (Stage Two, my fear had struck!). I had no idea where to go, nor what to do. I followed my basic instinct and went with the crowd.

After walking for a few minutes I asked the girl beside me where we were going. She informed me were going to see our Avaintes. I then noticed I was going to the wrong building and had to turn around and go back. I finally made it to the correct place about five minutes late. Before I walked in I had decided to try and talk to someone and hopefully make a friend. I scanned the room of five people and sat down beside the nicest person I could. We exchanged hellos and chit-chatted for a while until her friends from high school came in, and I was out. The day had already gotten off to a bad start, and this only made it

worse. There were about ten of us in the room, and all were ready to go. We waited and waited for someone to come in and tell us what to do. Twenty minutes later, in came our Avainte. She was coughing and hacking, as if she were about to die. She apologized and professed that she had the flu and could not talk to us (this made me feel even worse). She told us to look on our schedules for times and information, and if we have any questions look in the folder that was given to us at the beginning of the day. Then she asked if we had any more questions and told us to leave.

Again the Freshmen were all herded into a building to take a math placement test. The teacher came in and stated we need to do well on this because this will decide what math course we are ready for (Stage Three of my fear set in. I haven't taken a math course since eleventh grade, I probably have forgotten everything and will have to take the adding and subtracting course). The tests were passed out and all pencils were flying, except one, mine. For some reason, my mind froze. I could not even remember two plus two. I felt as if I were a kindergartner amongst a group of graduate students. After realizing my fear would cause me to do poorly on the test, I over came it and began to try to do some of the problems. An hour slowly crept by, each second felt as if it were taking years off of my life. The test was over, I felt a relief, one the day was almost over, and two, I thought I did okay.

Now that you know the state of mind that I was in, let me discuss the most stressful part of the orientation. Every person I talked to, young and old, were pressuring me to pick a major. I would talk to a student's parent and she would ask me what was my major. I would talk to a counselor and he would ask me what was my major. Even the janitor I spoke to on the way to the bathroom asked me what my major was. I answered every one of them with five solemn words "I haven't picked one yet." Each person informed me that if I did not pick one soon I would not graduate on time. All alone having no idea what to do, I began to feel a bit stressed out. I haven't even started college and people are telling me that I will not graduate on time. I could not understand, here I was 18 years old and I must know what career I want to retire from.

That night I called home in tears. My mother thought I was in an accident because of the way I was acting. I told her about the day I was having and how everyone was pressuring me on what to do. I practically begged her to just tell me what I need to major in and let it be over and done with. If she made a bad decision, I could blame her. Yet, Mom being the smart lady she is, informed me it was my decision to pick a major and not to let any one force me into anything.

12/ I'm a first year student at The University of Alabama. All of the issues confronting choosing the proper college are a little different for me because I am a student-athlete. The

choice of a college dealt not only with their academics, but also with the strength of the school's athletic program. The University of Alabama has a remarkable support system set aside for student-athletes. This system helps people like myself balance both academics and athletics in order to be successful at both. Another issue that comes into play are scholarships. Many athletes are given scholarships (both partial and full) in order to attend their particular college. In my situation, I was recruited by five different schools. This made me look into the different qualities of each individual institution. In some instances, this may be choosing between athletics and academics. Luckily, The University of Alabama had a good chemistry with both. Their business school is rated in the top 5% in the country and their track and field program maintained a consistent level of performance. The final push was the scholarship they offered. This added extra incentives to choose the University as the place to spend both my athletic and academic career. Another issue was the coaching staff. This issue would be the same as a regular student looking at the various professor in his or her major. The overall staff at the University impressed and supported my decision.

The issue of settling in was a small factor. My hometown is Chicago, Illinois, so I had to take into consideration the change in setting and atmosphere that would occur. I wasn't that worried about settling into college life. I actually was looking forward to the experience of college. It presented a different

setting than that of high school in both athletics and academics. The only worry I have is being able to do well on and off the track. College life is all how you take it. For some people it can steer them into the wrong direction, because of the freedom factor. The major factor is one's level of maturity and ability to accept diversity. If you're secure and true to yourself, settling in will play no major role on your college life.

College is an introduction to society and life as a professional. Diversity is ever present in both academics and society. The biggest problem I find most first year students dealing with is the ability to accept different cultural backgrounds. College is to be a learning experience not only to academics, but in life. It is set-up to teaching various skills needed in the work-force and the world as a whole. To be closed-minded is like failing a course. An individual who wants to succeed in today's America must posses the ability of accepting diversity and using it to his or her advantage. Simply remember that your background, both financially and ethnically, is different in many aspects of your fellow peers. In dealing with the social scene, one must be able to look beyond racism, peer-pressure, clicks, and any other issue that brings you away from achieving the best. Don't get me wrong, it's okay to have fun and enjoy the social scene, just don't get caught in its unproductive actions.

With all of the various distractions involved in college life, making the grade can become a challenging goal. It is

extremely easy to get too involved with outside activities that your studies begin to suffer. College is not like high school, there is no pressure by the instructors to complete assignment, or to attend class regularly; it's all up to you. The instructors figure you pay money, so it's your decision. Assignments are given at the beginning of the semester, therefore easily forgotten. Finding the energy to do assignments for your own benefit is hard to come by in college. You can be entertaining and indulging in all that college has to offer, and not pay attention to the reason why you're here in the first place: Education.

My advice is simple, come into college with your own individual goals and ideas. To allow this to work you must be able to stick by them. In dealing with reality, leave room for yourself to go astray. Hang in there, possess the determination needed to succeed in college and your life to come.

13/ Upon becoming adjusted to college life after the great transition from high school, "settling in" at The University of Alabama was a surprisingly easy adjustment for me. All of the new experiences that lay ahead and the absence of the familiarities of home were among my many freshman fears. Alabama, being a rather large school and a well-known university, looked especially large compared to my graduating class of roughly 200 students in a small town that even some Tuscaloosa natives had not heard of (although it was less than 60 miles

away). Living arrangements were also quite unfamiliar. Besides the adjustment from my roomy bedroom at home that I alone occupied to what seemed like a two by four cell in Tutwiler, the word freedom began to have a new meaning. Not only could I come and go as I pleased, but I now had to be responsible for waking myself up in the morning, and making sure I got things done on time without the constant reminders from my Mom. With these things to worry about, settling in looked impossible.

However, the university had a whole new look once school started. Especially beneficial to me as a freshman were the sizes of most of the courses offered to freshmen. Except for a chemistry class, none of my classes exceeded 35 students. The professors' friendliness and willingness to help aided in my adjustment to college life. As far as housing went, although I had cringed at the thought of a dorm, I was shocked to find that the smallness of the rooms proved to form a closeness between the 700 girls that occupied the building. The closeness to campus also proved helpful those mornings you dread walking to class. All in all, my experience as a freshman settling in at the University was a positive one.

14/ The beginning of my college career starts of course with choosing which college to attend. There are so many out there that have so much to offer for everyone. My task was to find the university that was right for me and offered me the

chance to excel in everything. I finally chose the University of Alabama.

Settling in at the University was a little difficult. For one, it was the first time that I had ever been away from home and my family. Second, I knew no one else here at the University, and third, my parents would not allow me to bring my car with me for the first semester. But after being here a few weeks, meeting a couple of new people, and learning my way around campus, things began to get better.

Classes at the University are a lot different than those of high school. For the first time I was sitting in a classroom full of 300 other people, this was truly unreal to me. How was I going to communicate with my teacher. Also, being a quiet person, I was terrified to ask any questions in front of a group of that size. The instructors treat everyone the same, but sometimes it seemed as if there is no mercy for you. Once I remember having five exams in the matter of four days. These were the worst four days of my life, for when would I have the chance to study for four exams and do homework and keep up in my other two classes. It was stressful, trying, and even a little discouraging, but somehow I made it through. After a lot of hard work and effort, I received a 3.2 GPA, a scholarship, and an academic award. I was so proud of myself.

My sophomore year was a lot better. I didn't have to learn to adapt to anything because I was used to the University and the way it operated. My student life was great. I was involved

actively in three organizations, I was still making good grades, and having fun all at the same time.

During my first semester as a sophomore I held a job. This type of thing is something that not everyone can do. First, you have to work the job around school, second the job might interfere with your school, and third, instructors don't care if you work or not, you still must do the class work. After about a month of working, I quit because school was much more important to me than a job at the time.

By the end of my sophomore year, which is now, I received another academic excellence award and again I was very proud of myself.

15/ I was so bored in high school I didn't even try. I usually goofed off and got in trouble. As a consequence I was rarely in class at all, much less paying attention. I did well enough on the ACT to get into two schools. The only two schools I applied to were Florida State University and The University of Alabama. I chose UA after visiting the campus with my Mom. I was very nervous about having to really try to make good grades.

The process of settling in was very painstaking. Me and my Mother looked at every apartment in Tuscaloosa. Most were very similar. The deciding factor ended up being location. I was mature enough to realize the closer I was to campus, the less class I would miss. We chose the Capstone Condominiums. It's location is superb and is also very nice on the inside.

The first year I lived by myself. Living by myself was great. I came and went as I pleased. I didn't have to worry about keeping the place neat or whether to not I was getting all of my messages, etc. I did well my first year in school, trying to make an impression on those who thought I was a high school clown. There was always time to study when you live alone. I am a typical procrastinator, all I require is another offer and I will close my books. Living alone there aren't near as many offers to do other things as when you have roommates.

Another reason why getting settled in was so painstaking was getting all of my services hooked up. It seemed like I would never have everything working all at once. There were hook-up fees, service charges, and huge deposits, not to mention having to wait all day for them to come hook it up. The off-campus housing association helped me out with some of the deposits. I believe it was a $10 or $20 membership fee, and that made it to where you didn't have to put deposits down on some of the services. It took probably four weeks before I had a functional bachelor pad.

The social scene here at UA is very unusual. I was caught completely off-guard by it. I am from Florida, and although its only four hours away, young people dress and behave completely different.

I first attended UA in the summer of 1992. Just to get a head start before everyone else arrived in the fall. I met a few nice people and we went out occasionally, but nothing major.

Then when the fall semester began I pledged a fraternity. From then on I stayed occupied. I was either at study hall, cleaning up, drunk, or at some sort of function (the last two usually went together). I have never had someone or something demand that much of my time.

It seems almost like a blur now. Going to football games and swaps, then having to go back and clean-up the house. I thought I was going to die.

One good thing that came out of pledging was my grades! Fall semester I took 15 real hours. I made a 3.2 GPA. For me this was unheard of. The mandatory fraternity study hall got me these grades and therefore got me a step in the right direction.

16/ I am a very good student. I am not gifted in anyway, in fact I have A.D.D. I'm sure most are familiar with this now (it's popular to have it now). It wasn't in high school. Anyway I'm not gifted, but I do work very hard. I have three ways that will guarantee good grades: being a brainchild (I wasn't), studying for hours everyday (never), and never skipping class (my personal philosophy). I found that by never skipping class and paying attention most of the time I could make good grades without studying very much. I would go over the material one or two nights before a major test and that was all it would take. I rarely even read the out-of-class material. I discovered the majority of the professors cover almost everything on the test during class, so as long as you attend them all and take good

notes, you can spend your spare time at leisure. I have only missed about 15-20 total classes in three complete years of school. That's about three classes a semester. I hardly ever study and have a 3.3 GPA.

17/ With me getting eligible for a football scholarship, the next choice was what college should I sign with. I was looking for a school with a strong football program as well as a strong academic program. Keeping all this in mind, I was going to stay in the SEC. The University of Alabama was first on my list. Even though this University was first, I still checked my options well. Mississippi State had a lot to offer with the academics, but the football program could do better. With me taking a visit to only these two schools my choice could be easier. Auburn, Southern Mississippi, and Ole Miss were other options, but I really didn't want to go there. So I kept my mind with the Tide and the Bulldogs.

The choice I had to make was getting near. My parents didn't have much say-so, because I was going to spend the next four or five years at that particular college. After the coaches from each school came to visit my house, I liked what the Tide coaches were saying. They told me that the offense they run will best fit me. This was very important. They also told me that they will do everything they could to help me with my school work. After hearing this I made my choice: "Tide here I come!"

After spending a couple of months at the University of Alabama, everything has gone well. I sure am glad I came.

18/ Point blank: go to class. I personally can not stress this enough. It's equivalent to opening your eyes while your driving. I honestly can not emphasize enough the need. You go to class and you get a C. Don't go to class and join the Academic Probation Club.

The Academic Probation Club is a non-profit organization dedicated to all those students who just couldn't get up in the morning. Membership dues are anything under a 2.0 GPA each semester and the secret is the longer you are in the club, the harder it is to leave. Club privileges include conversations with officials in the Admissions Office, lengthy chats with your parents, and your very own "Placed on Probation" stamp of approval that you can show to all your buddies at Report Card Time. And did I mention the possibility of temporary suspension and full suspension? If you are one of those people that really gets off on stress, this could be your boat.

Personally, I've been in the club for four years. I guess you could almost say I'm like a president. Let me tell you, I know the system. I'll probably get a job with the school helping students along during their under 2.0 experience. I'll sit in an office and recommend what bars they go to drown their sorrows, give advice on schmoozing the parents, and tell war stories about

how I was on it for four and a half years and now I'm a graduate. They will put a poster up of me with "I made it, so can you."

The secret really is in attendance. If you want bad grades, just don't go to class, it's guaranteed. Just sleep in, wake up, watch HBO, a couple of bong hits, just relax man. You got years and years of college in front of you. These days everybody is taking six years to graduate. Tell your parents "hey, college is tougher than it was in the 60's."

Stay out a lot. Find yourself a nice group of losers that are heavily involved in drugs and alcohol and put your feet up. No sweating with this group. Trust me. With the right group of guys your bad grades will look pretty compared to the crimes these kids are committing. Tell your Mom you are just trying to find yourself. Tell Pop, you've got everything straight to get these grades up next semester. Hey, no worries. You can turn college into the four hour cruise from Gilligan's Island.

Next thing you know you'll be home for Christmas your fourth year and your Grandmother will ask you when your going to grow up. Friends you graduated with from high school will be getting ready to have real jobs, and you'll be worried about weather or not you can get a 3.8 so you can stay in school another semester. Trust me, take the probation route and you will be fully prepared to cope with the stress of life. You'll be like a war veteran, smoking and being real quiet, telling people you've been to hell and back.

19/ The second semester of my junior year I had a teacher named Dr. Marcus. An advisor told me to take SPE 367 when I went to her with my class schedule, I had never taken an SPE course before this point in my college career. SPE 367 was almost at the highest level of special education that anyone could have taken. That class for me was pretty much impossible and very time consuming since I had no idea of what I was doing. The professor embarrassed me in class on several occasions when I would ask her questions in class about what we were doing. On one occasion she embarrassed me so bad I left the room crying. Then soon after that experience I went to her to explain to her why I wasn't able to understand the things she was talking about in class. She didn't seem to understand or care about anything I had to tell her that day. So I struggled through the semester as hard as I could and tried to do my best just to get out of her class. Well, the following semester of my Senior year I had Dr. Marcus again for SPE 271. It was a Wednesday night class that met at 5:00 to 7:50. She had a policy that you were only allowed one miss and then you went down a grade level for every miss after that, but she never said anything about having doctor's excuses. She also never put anything about it in her syllabus. I had missed three times by the end of the semester and every time after the first I showed her a doctors excuse. She never said anything about it accounting for anything; she just simply wrote a mark in her book and we went on with class. When the end of the semester came she then decided to tell everyone that we

would drop a letter grade if we had missed more than once. So for every time we missed we went down a letter grade. So I went down from an A to a C in the class for something I was not aware of until the end of the semester. I do not think some of the teachers at this university are fair nor clear.

The Social Scene

20/ No one ever said that attending a university was going to be easy. Since I've been at The University of Alabama I have learned to adjust to how things work. Just because I have adjusted does not mean I have conformed. Some activities that go on I will never agree with. I don't have to follow them or understand them, but I do realize that activities are different from those that occur at a junior college. University life has been a difficult adjustment after attending a junior college for two years.

Before I decided to attend The University of Alabama, I realized that it was going to be a big change from the 4,000 student junior college I attended for two years. I am an out-of-state student who wanted to move away from home for a while to experience living on my own. There is a university my home town, but I chose not go there because I wanted to see what it was like to go somewhere else. One of the biggest adjustments I have made is living far from home. Sometimes I wish I was a little closer to home. I guess one of the main reasons for being homesick is because I don't know that many people here. One thing that is very different from my junior college that may seem minute to you but is important to me is bad sidewalk etiquette. One would think that since this is a college in the South that some actions would abide by Southern hospitality. When I walk to class everyday, I walk by many people that never seem to notice that

anyone else is in the world other than themselves. At junior college or even high school, everyone kept their chin up and said hello or gave a smile to everyone they passed in public. It didn't matter if you didn't know someone because I surely didn't know all 4,000 students on the campus. Being nice was just the thing to do. I realize that the minds of students of a university are on more important subjects such as their upper level courses and graduating, but everyone should take time to notice the scenery. A smile from you just might make someone's day.

A realization that I had to deal with when I first came here was that such substances as drugs and alcohol were completely out in the open. Alcohol has never really been that hard of a thing to come by if some people wanted to party on the weekend. They could always find someone willing to buy it for them. Here at the University alcohol is even easier to come by. I guess when one of the first things you notice when you arrive on campus is the college package store, then you realize that alcohol consumption is an accepted activity among university students. One aspect I don't understand is how some students don't wait until the weekend to party. They do it all week long on any given night of the week. I personally could not go to class the next day. Most of those students probably don't. A substance that I had never seen before I came here is pot. I never realized that so many people do it. When you are sitting in a room with a few friends and someone walks in and holds up a

plastic bad with pot in it and offers it to everyone, you realize just how open people are with this. One thing that surprised me most is that a couple of people in the room took the guy up on his offer to get high.

Another aspect that I have found to be a little troubling is the fact that it is very hard to fit in as a transfer student. I think it is a disadvantage to come in as a junior because those who have been here as freshmen already know each other. It kind of seems like the entire business school, to which I belong, is full of cliques. These people are used to the students they have had the same classes with as a freshman. I'm not condemning this at all because I know how easy it is to stick with the same crowd because I've been guilty of the same thing before. I guess I just think that at least some of these students would welcome acquaintances, but this hard to do when they really don't even acknowledge you. I thought I would get to know some of the students in my classes, and I do know one or two of the people that sit next to me. What gets to me is when I see some of the people from my classes somewhere other than class, and they aren't too friendly. Maybe you think it's just because I don't have what it takes to be noticed. Sorry, but I beg to differ. Now I am not a conceded person by any means. All I'm saying is that I've always been a very popular girl and have always been a part of everything on campus. I've never had trouble fitting in anywhere until now. Maybe it's my fault, but I don't know. I try not to think about it too much. I am very thankful for the

friends that I do have and for the good times I have had here. Sometimes I wonder that if I were in a sorority would I have more fun and know more people, but being in a sorority is just not logical at this point. For one thing, I don't think I would have the time to be so involved because I am in upper level courses that require lots of commitment. As a freshman I could have handled it but not now. Another thing is I guess I probably couldn't afford it because as of right now, I am incredibly in debt from paying for school. I don't see how I could spend money on that, besides, my loans wouldn't stretch to cover it anyway. The downfall of not belonging to a sorority is because UA is so Greek. Everywhere I go I see Greek, but I guess that's all a part of it.

Even though I have had some hard times adjusting to some of the things that go on around here, I have finally adjusted to many things. I am sure next semester I will face many more obstacles that will seem "not so big" by the end of the semester. I'm not saying that these things I've mentioned are not important anymore; it's just that these are things I can't change so I don't contemplate on them. Every once in a while I wonder if I made the right decisions by coming here, but I guess I'll never know because I don't know how things are at other universities. For now I am going to enjoy being here while I can and try not to worry that everything doesn't go the way I'd like it to. For the next year and a half or so that I have left at Alabama, I am

going to make the best of it. One day I will look back on these few years of my life and remember the good things.

21/ I am a sophomore and this is past year was my first year at Alabama. I'm in athletics and enjoy it very much. However, my first year in school was the worst. Not that I didn't like college life, but since I was in athletics my first year we were on the road almost every weekend, and when we weren't on the road we were practicing, so the transition from high school to college was very hard and making the grades were even harder. You had to manage your time very well. You really didn't have time for a social life. All I did was eat, sleep, practice, and study. We hardly ever went out my first semester of school. I really had to adjust. In high school we practiced maybe two hours, but it was very relaxed, etc. When I came to college we practiced for about three and a half to four hard hours. Then we had study hall Monday through Thursday for two hours a day. NO EXCUSES! Then you barely had enough time to go grab you something to eat until it was time for weights, or practice. I really loved my sport but there were some days where I asked myself if it was really worth it. But I kept going even on days when I really thought I was going to die. Not just from practice, but in studying for a test. It never seemed like we had enough time. However, my first semester flew by and my second semester rolled around. Things had kind of slowed down and the intense attitude was more relaxed. We could focus on

academics now. I ended up doing really well my first semester and second. When I look back those were some of the best times I had. I'm still playing and there are still days when I ask myself if it is worth it, but I still keep going. Taking everyday one by one. After all, I only have two more years left to play a division one sport. I think all the hard work is paying off especially when your team has a winning season and a great academic year. Now I think I could not see myself going to college and not playing a sport, I enjoy it so much. I think its a lot of hard work and a lot of getting used to, but it's all worth it in the end.

22/ As a sophomore at the University I feel I have been through several things on campus. I found my freshman year very difficult. Coming from a high school here in Tuscaloosa (Hillcrest High) where everyone knew each other and were all pretty good friends to a college that I found very hard to fit in. I decided to live at home and not take part in a fraternity. I have never thought those two things would ever have such an effect on me. I was never the type to look down on people for any reason and never understood why anyone could or even wanted to. Well, when I came to this campus and the most often asked questions were "Where are you from?" and "What fraternity are you in?" It became old telling people I was an independent and then that person never speaking to me again. I also found it hard to get involved on campus not having any connections Greek or

otherwise. But slowly and surely I got into a few things where I met some GREAT people. From those people I met others and then became very involved and my whole attitude towards the U of A became very positive. I even decided to join a fraternity the next fall (if you can't beat 'em, join 'em) where I met some of my best friends and became much more involved on campus. I even tried out for Big Al (the mascot) and made it. I was ecstatic and things are still going very well.

I can honestly say I've seen all spectrums of this campus. I was an independent, an active independent, a part of the athletic department (as Big Al) and in the Greek system.

Being Big Al, though, has been my most memorable and exciting part of campus life. Traveling with the cheerleaders all over the country for games, tournaments, competitions, and you name it. Big Al definitely does more than meets the eye. As a freshman sitting with all my buddies from high school was fun, but burning up inside that costume down on the football field on game day was even a more awesome experience.

I have a 3.0 GPA, nothing wonderful but it will have to do for now until I am able to have time to focus more on school. I know that sounds horrible for me to say I don't have time, but it's really true. I always thought people would use that line as an excuse, well, they were probably telling the truth!

The spring of my sophomore year has even gotten better. In February I made Capstone Men and Women, a very distinguished group here and I was so excited!! My college career definitely

started off slow, but it is off to a running start. I have had some wonderful experiences on campus and I still have two years to go. It has definitely been a weird experience, but one that I've enjoyed and learned from.

23/ I am a senior at the University of Alabama and college life has definitely been an experience I will never forget. Looking back on the last four years I experienced a lot. For example, my freshman year was a big adjustment because I was away from home in a strange place trying to adjust. This year to me was one that was critical because at the end of my freshman year I would have to decide if this was where I wanted to stay for the next three years of school. My sophomore year was great and I was involved a lot on campus from teaching aerobics at the Recreation Center to Referring Flag Football. My junior year was more laid back because I was finally used to college life and how to study and juggle my work schedule. Now, that I am a senior, I was all excited about coming back for my last year because this was it. I had one last time to experience everything again before I got out into the "real world." Well, my senior year has not been anything I had expected it to be. My first semester was a total nightmare because I had a professor who kept asking me out. He made me very uncomfortable in class and was very persistent. I tried to ignore it and act like it never happened, but I could not. He ended up giving me a bad grade on my final because he did not like it and even though I had completed everything on the

syllabus, his word was final. At that point, I had decided it had gone far enough, so I was going to go to the Chair of the Department. He then directed me to the Dean and the Sexual Harassment Counselor. I explained my situation and told them I had one more semester in this department and I did not want this to affect my grades. They assured me it would be confidential if I would file a complaint. Well, within the next two weeks there was talk about it all over the department and everyone was trying to figure out who it was. I was so disappointed that I have decided to hold this complaint until I graduate because I know my grades will be affected no matter what they say. Up until this point I was very pleased with The University of Alabama and the education I had received. Now I am disappointed in the actions and I know that in the end nothing will ever happen to this professor and he will ask some other student out and they will have to go through the same thing I did. I am glad to be graduating because my standards for Alabama have dropped.

24/ Perhaps the single most distinctive experience I've had while here at The University of Alabama is going through sorority Rush as a freshman. I didn't really want to, but my mother felt that it would make my college experience much easier if I did. Although I am a native of Tuscaloosa, I was completely unprepared for the enormity of the whole Rush process. I was a little skeptical about sorority life, and had no great expectations.

The five day selection process began with an evening convocation. The Rho Chi's told us what would happen, and to dress coolly and comfortably. They said we'd be standing out in the hot August weather quite often, so I took their advice. Bright and early the next morning I assembled with the other girls in my group in front of the first 17 houses we were to visit that day.

No one can accurately describe the shock one feels when they are standing calmly and nervously in front of a house, and suddenly the doors swing open filled with approximately 100 beaming faces yelling rhythms at the tops of their lungs. I almost jumped out of my skin. All I could do was stand there and gape at them. I can't imagine how I looked from their perspective. However, after a few moments I regained my composure, waited until they finished, and walked into the house. There, I met every girl in the sorority at least once. I can't honestly say that I remembered even one of them when I was graciously escorted out just ten minutes later. I don't know how I made it but I did, and then I repeated the same process 16 more times. The entire day was and still is a blurry haze of colorful dresses and bright smiles, and although I only had this information to go by, I picked the houses I wanted to go back to.

The second day was much easier. The "door songs," I found out they were called, didn't startle me at all, and when we entered each house, I only had to talk to four or five girls. Each house performed a skit that gave information about the

organization, and cold drinks and snacks were served. This made it much easier to decide who I fit in with. Some girls were very nice, and some were not so nice, but I didn't mind this day at all.

The next day was just like the previous one. And so was the next. Each day we narrowed our choices until we finally picked the one we wanted. Some girls didn't get their first choice and were disappointed, but I got mine and was happy.

I hate to say it, but my mother was once again right. I am now a senior and am glad I have had my sorority sisters for the past four years. They have helped me tremendously, and given me an incredible amount of courage and self-confidence. Don't think everyday has been perfect, because it hasn't, but I never would have gotten as much out of this university without them.

25/ My senior year in high school, after I had decided to attend The University of Alabama, I had another decision to make. I had to decide whether or not I would go out for Rush. I had two friends coming to the University. One was a boy who opted not to Rush, the other was a girl who decided to Rush. After discussing it with my parents, I decided I would go out for Rush.

I received the Rush booklet about a month before rush began. I remember thinking "none of these girls look like me." My Mother is a Panamanian, so I have a distinct look anyway, the booklet made me nervous, but I decided not to worry about it.

I had gotten all of my dresses together and my friend came to look at them. She told me they were totally inappropriate and I needed to find something else to wear. Well this really upset me, so my Mom took me shopping and I chose new dresses.

Well, the day came to move to Tuscaloosa and to begin Rush. I'm an only child, so I was a little anxious about this whole procedure. My parents and I packed up the cat and headed down to Tuscaloosa. The trip seemed to take forever and I was terrified. Well, we pulled beside the dorm and I got my room assignment. My friend had the room next to me. We unpacked and it was time for my parents to go. I begged them to stay, but they wouldn't.

Well after they left my friend and I were talking. She told me she would let me know if she thought any of the houses would be prejudiced against me. I had never even thought about this, so I was kind of in shock. I though "why would they be prejudiced" and she said because you are Hispanic. Of course, this made me very nervous.

Then it was time for the first convocation which was just a meeting telling us about what was going to happen. I was sitting in a room with 800 girls who looked nothing like me. Needless to say, I was nervous.

Well, the next day Rush began. I was terrified. I was totally overwhelmed by the experience, but as the week progressed I fell in love with one house. But then, I overheard everyone saying they loved that house too. I thought I would never get in, they would take all of these other girls before they took me.

I told my friend what house I liked and she said she liked them too. But, I shouldn't hold my breath because I probably wouldn't get them because of my background.

Well, the morning we were going to get our bids we had to be in our rooms waiting on a phone call in case we were dropped. My friend got a call. I didn't.

I went to the stadium and opened my card. I had gotten what I wanted! Suddenly my friend wouldn't even speak to me anymore and I realized she had been jealous all along.

It was hard to adjust to college life having to deal with her harassing me, meeting new people and being away from home. At first I hated it, but I knew if I went home I wouldn't be happy. So I stayed here and have had the best four years of my life.

Senior Year!

26/ I hate the job search process! Searching for a job as a graduating senior is the hardest and scariest thing I haver ever had to do. I remember being so nervous during my first interview that when I went to change clothes my whole chest was red. I was thinking, "How am I ever going to land a job!" I didn't want to have another interview again, but I knew I had to continue on if I had any chance of having a future. After a few interviews and talking with some people, I began to become more relaxed in the interviews. This was during the fall of my senior year, so I wasn't getting too nervous yet about not having any offers. I was still very disappointed though.

Over Christmas break, I went to Arizona to visit my family. While I was there, I had a long talk with my brother-in-law who gave me some great advice about how to approach an interview and some things to say. It is nice to have somebody to talk to that is supportive and understands what you are going through. I also talked to my sister about my worries about not having a job after graduation. She said, "When the right job comes along, you will know it." My response was "yea right." Her and everyone else in my family said everything will work out for the best and not to worry that they would support me until I could find a job. I know that they will, but I hate to be dependent on other people for things. I guess that is just me being the stubborn person that I am.

Well it is now the second week of March, and I have finally heard back from a company. The exciting part is that it is actually the company I want to work for, which would be Wal-Mart. I couldn't believe it when I opened my mail box and saw a thick envelope from them. The letter came on Saturday, and I had been checking my mail all week even for a rejection letter from them. I just wanted to know something. I ran back to my apartment and tore open the letter, and it was a formal job offer. I couldn't believe it. I called everyone to tell them about it. My sisters and everyone told me to keep looking and not to accept the first job offer that come along, but this was the one I wanted. Coming out of my interview, I just knew that was the job I wanted. I told the people I worked with, my parents, and friends. I thought that might have jinxed it when I hadn't heard anything back from them all week. For some reason, I wasn't nervous at all going into the interview, and it was a relaxed interview which I thought went well. That doesn't mean anything because other interviews that I thought went well never panned out, or at least I still haven't heard anything from some of them. That really makes me angry when recruiters do that. At least they could have the courtesy to send a rejection letter. I would rather that than nothing at all. But I guess my sister was right after all, "When the right job comes along, you will just know it."

I can't stress enough how relieved I feel now that I have a job after graduation. The worrying and the interviewing is all

over. All the pressure and anxiety is gone, but now it is replaced with excitement and wanting to get out of school sooner. Now all I have to do is keep my grades up, prepare for graduation, and continue doing research on the company I am going to work for. I want to know everything there is to know about the company, so I will be better prepared for my first day of work.

27/ Spring semester has arrived and I have already had numerous interviews. It is getting about March and I am starting to get worried about not finding a job. My parents keep reminding me not to worry that they will be there for me when I graduate, but that still isn't relieving my worries. I have been trying not to let it bother me, but it is really hard not to considering it is just my future on the line. It is times like this that I wish I would have done an internship while I was a junior. I feel that lack of experience is my biggest fault, even though I know I am a good worker and am willing to learn. I just discovered about the possibilities of internships to late. I wish that my earlier professors would have talked and stressed the importance of internships. I feel that all students should look into doing internships as a way to gain valuable experience in the working world before your senior year. Joining clubs and becoming actively involved in them is another avenue that I wish I would have pursued. Again, I was to late at realizing the importance this can have during the interview process. I don't

know what I was doing through school, but it certainly wasn't preparing for my senior year when I had to start interviewing. It is amazing at how hard things can hit you at the last minute. With graduation only being a couple months away, it is too late to change things now. I will just have to hope for the best, which isn't easy when you don't hear back from any of the companies you have been interviewing with. Looking back and being in the position I am in now, I wish more than ever that I would have done an internship and gotten actively involved in clubs. This might not have guaranteed me a job, but it would put me at a much greater advantage point considering I am competing for jobs with people who are more prepared than I am for the working world.

28/ I am at my senior year with 35 hours left to go in Mechanical Engineering. The one thing that I have realized at this point is that I'm not sure if I want to be a Mechanical Engineer. Being in college and especially the College of Engineering, you are introduced to many things so as a result, my interests have changed since I was a freshman. My interests have even changed on self-assessment tests. As a result of all of this, one tends not to do well in classes because your attention is not there. There are many students that feel this way at the end of their tenure at a university. One is sometimes still confused as they were when they arrived.

Another big part of my senior year is noticing the change in campus in the last five years. You see many attitudes change in students and in the atmosphere. Usually by this time all of the students you started with are either graduated, transferred or dropped out. This leaves you with very few friends. From what I've noticed, a lot of seniors don't get along with the younger crowd because seniors are more focussed on life while freshmen have not begun to think that far ahead.

The third aspect of my senior year is the fact that you are about to enter the real world. You are faced with the job market as well as taking care of yourself for as long as you live. A lot of people don't realize it, but, that is a big job. You are faced with bills and trying to start a family. So all of this responsibility is about to fall on you. Most seniors don't take time out to realize what is about to happen, but I think it requires a lot of thought.

29/ I am a non-traditional college student. I was in the Army, married, divorced, and have a child. School has not been the easiest thing to accomplish for me, but yes, I am finally going to graduate. The University of Alabama as a whole is not accommodating for single parents. There are many courses that have only three absences allowed. This is difficult if a child gets a fever and is not allowed in day-care. I have had this difficulty. I must say there have been individual teachers and professors who have been understanding with these circumstances.

Homework assignments, research papers, and computer lab assignments have at times been difficult to do (as well as group projects) due to lack of funds for a babysitter and time. It is difficult for one to pay for college, work, take care of a child, and accomplish school work also.

I feel that I have learned how to manage time, stress, and family because of these hardships. Now I have an added stress and that is trying to find a job. It is more difficult when there is not enough time to do all the things that need to be done at school.

I understand that traditional students may need to learn to manage their time in order to accomplish goals in the future, but for those of us non-traditional students it can be difficult. If I were to put 100% effort into school, I would have to take the time away from something else and I refuse to give up time with my daughter.

Another area that I would like to mention is the difficulty that non-traditional students have in developing friends. I have friends that are in similar situations and we would love to be able to do something "fun," but the most we can do is catch each other at a quick lunch or a five minute chat between classes. This situation is disappointing in that we need friendships as a support for what we are trying to accomplish. I feel that more faculty should be aware of the circumstances of non-traditional, single-parent students.

All in all I have enjoyed college and I do feel a sense of pride in having accomplished my goal of a degree and look forward to getting a job.

30/ My senior year at the University of Alabama has been quite enjoyable. Looking back over the first three years that I spent here, things have really changed. When I decided to attend Alabama, I thought it was going to be one big party, however, I quickly realized that in order to "make the grade" I would have to spend less time at the Strip and more time at the library. At first I felt as though I did not belong here. I guess I had these feelings because I was 1,300 miles away from home. Yet, I stuck it out and now I can not imagine having attended another university.

This year I have been faced with a number of important decisions. One of the most important being what to do after graduation. I decided to major in Criminal Justice and minor in Law, Public Policy, and Society while at the University because it has been my life long dream to become a criminal defense attorney. I felt as though these courses would best prepare me in achieving this goal. While studying Criminal Justice, I have had the fascinating experience of touring some of Alabama's prisons, children's agencies, and meet several truly amazing people. In Dr. Ida Johnson's class, we toured Kilby and Tutwiler prison and had the unique experience of hearing the stories of incarceration from the offender's themselves.

This year I have been greatly fortunate in being able to work in the Criminal Justice office, as well. This has given me the opportunity to meet students who are not in my classes and to work closely with Criminal Justice faculty and staff. Also, by working in the Criminal Justice office I began to learn the benefits of obtaining a master's degree. Prior to this year, my plan had always been to graduate in four years and then attend law school in the Boston area. In preparing for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), I began to realize that I may not get into law school my first time applying. This idea truly terrified me! What could I do if I couldn't be a lawyer? Shortly after I completed my law school applications, I received a letter from the Criminal Justice Department informing me that I was qualified for expedited admission to graduate school at the University. This letter opened up a new door for me. After giving the idea great consideration, I decided to apply to graduate school in addition to law school. I figured that if I couldn't get into law school this fall, I could stay at the University for a little while longer and then apply to law school.

31/ Its amazing to me how quickly four years have escaped me. I have just under a month left before I graduate and I already miss school even though I'm dying to leave. Looking back is all a blur. Even though time passed so quickly, specific times seem so long ago. For instance, my freshman year is more

like another life time than a few years back. I was terrified of Alabama from the moment I arrived for orientation. Everything was so enormous and I seemed so small. Once school started I pledged a sorority and sought solace in numbers. This eased the pressure of being just another student among what seemed like millions. Freshman year I don't think I left the company of my friends.

Sophomore year the newness of college wore away quickly. Suddenly I wasn't the baby anymore. There were people younger than me that asked me for advice. This didn't seem quite right since I still wasn't exactly sure what was going on myself. I still needed the security of my friends though not quite so much. I did venture out alone, but not by choice. I still felt younger than everyone and wanted my friends reassurance as they wanted me.

Junior year things began to turn around. I found I had come to know a lot of people over the past few years. The fact that I was older (but not too old) made me a little more comfortable. It wasn't long before I quickly realized that I pretty much new it all and what I didn't know I could make up as I went. Junior year was certainly my most fun time. It was the perfect age and was just before it hit me that I eventually had to graduate.

I have always heard that Senior Year is a blast. However, probably about late summer I began to look around and notice I was the oldest person. This meant only one thing, I was the next to go. At first I was in denial, thinking if I just ignore this

fact it would away. However I was forced to come to terms with it. I soon accepted that I could no longer cling to each stage of college. I had evolved into independence and there was no turning back. I no longer needed my friends for the purpose of security. I no longer fought the fact that I was a member of the masses. I was left at this school fearing a loss of identify but through the years found my own identity and am now comfortable. Its a shame I have to leave.

32/ At the beginning of my senior year I started to really think about what I was going to do with my future. I knew I had to either start sending my application out now or start applying to graduate schools. I sat down with my parents and discussed all of my options. I finally came to a conclusion that I was scared to face the real world and look for a job on my own and I would try to go to graduate school instead. After I decided to apply to graduate school, I had to think about which schools to apply and what I wanted to get my degree in. I am majoring in Hotel and Restaurant management and unfortunately not many schools offer a master's degree in that field, including the University of Alabama. I talked to one of my professors and she said if I did go to graduate school at Alabama she would design a program for me to follow concentrating on hotel management. I thought that was a great idea and decided to apply only to Alabama.

Now that I decided to apply I didn't know the first thing about the process of applying. Luckily, I received a letter in the mail from the graduate school here at Alabama asking me to please apply through the expedited application. This meant that my GPA was high enough to go to graduate school. I didn't have to pay an application fee or get any references. All I had to do was write a statement of purpose and turn it in. That is what I did.

The next step I quickly learned was that I had to take either the GRE or MAT to get in graduate school. The only time the GRE was offered was on April 13 and you wouldn't get your scores until two months later. The MAT however, was offered twice a week and you could receive your scores three weeks later. I decided to take the MAT. My scores came back and I got 40 out of 100 correct. The University of Alabama requires 50 out of 100 to be correct to get in. I went to talk with an admissions counselor and she told me not to take it again and just sit and wait for my letter of acceptance. I could definitely get in or at least conditionally. That means I must maintain a "B" average to stay in graduate school, which you have to do anyway.

At the present time it has been two months later and I still have not heard anything at all! It is one month until I graduate and I am starting to panic. Until I get that letter of acceptance I can't get a job, can't get an apartment and sign a lease of any sort, and I can't sign up for any classes. I am disappointed in Alabama for taking such a long process to tell me

if I'm accepted or not because they are usually so quick about getting information to you. I wish now that I would have turned my application in sooner so that I would have heard something sooner. I guess it is partially my fault too.

I am nervous about taking classes at a masters level, but I am glad that I will be getting another degree. Hopefully I will get a better job from having my masters degree. Wish me luck!

33/ I have always considered myself a hard-working student. I make good grades, not spectacular, but good enough to keep a 3.0 GPA in college. Since my freshman year, I knew I would graduate in four years. It wasn't something I even thought about because I knew my parents would be very disappointed if I did not graduate on time.

So here I am, a senior with three weeks left until graduation. I am on time, but lets just say it was no easy task. Ever since I changed my major in the middle of my sophomore year, I've had a constant struggle in order to set my schedule in a way that I would graduate on time. One of the most difficult aspects of college is figuring out what you want to do for the rest of your life. This is what college is all about, right? Well, how many 18 year olds do you think actually know exactly what they want to do for the rest of their lives. I'll tell you: not many. So it happens, quite frequently, that someone will come to college majoring in something that they believed they would enjoy. By the end of their first or second year, they are either

failing all of their classes or realizing they are simply uninterested in the subject.

This happened to me in the fact that I came to college thinking I was going to become an actress. I was very involved in high school drama and wanted to continue my interest in theater. So I chose this as my major and began my college career. One and a half-years later, in the middle of my sophomore year, I changed my mind. It wasn't that I disliked theater, or that I was doing badly, on the contrary, I enjoyed it very much. But, people grow and change in college, and I had done the same. No longer did I aspire to be an actress for the rest of my life. I wanted a more practical major, something that would more or less assure me of a job after graduation.

So here my long journey of changing my major began. Actually changing was not difficult. The arduous task is figuring out what classes, and how many, I would have to take in order to graduate on time. This is where I must admit my advisor did not help much. It wasn't entirely her fault. She was swamped with an over-abundance of students to advise and had to rely on her computer system for all information. Because of this fact, I was forced to sit down with a list of requirements from my major, my minor requirements, and my catalog. Many long, confused, hours were spent this way trying to decipher my schedule for the next two years. But afterwards I had educated myself and did not have to rely solely on my advisor to tell me what I needed to take. She was still there for double-checking,

but I knew what was going on and this reassured me that I would, in fact, graduate on time. So my advice to others beginning their college career: sit down now and figure out exactly what you need to take. If you wait for it to just "fall in place," you may be in college for a few extra semesters!

34/ I am one month from graduation and while I am ready to get out, it is also a bit scary. College can be a bit of a crutch - you are technically an adult with deadlines, bills, and lots of work. However, most students are supported at least in part by parents and the campus is not exactly the real world. When I went off to college, I didn't see it as really being on my own because you are still in a school setting. However, as I look upon graduation, graduate school, and getting a job, I see myself as moving out on my own for the first time.

I must say my senior year has definitely been the best out of the four. By the way, I am actually graduating in four years without summer school, thank you very much! Anyway, although my school work load is as much as it has ever been, I am still having a lot of fun. I think I have begun to manage my time better so that I can fit in a social life with school and work. My boyfriend is in another state, so I spend a lot of time with my friends to keep my mind off of missing him. I am moving across the country with him in one month, so I guess I will then miss my friends, though not my long-distance phone bills!

I am very excited about graduating and moving on with my future husband, but at the same time I wonder about my success in the job search. I don't wish to do anything with the bachelor's degree I will receive, so I plan on going to graduate school in something else. I hope I will eventually find the career in the field that is truly fulfilling and enjoyable to me. Before attending graduate school, however, I plan on taking a year off to work. I am only 21 and don't need to rush into anything. Besides, I am a little exhausted from school after four years of 18 hour course loads. I need a break (and some money), and besides, I really enjoy working.

College has definitely been a worthwhile experience for me and I am proud of my performance. I am optimistic about my future and ready for its challenges.

35/ I began my job hunting during the fall semester of my senior year. I began by dropping resumes at the Career Center. I have a three step procedure for resume drops --

1/ Drop resumes with companies I <u>want</u> to work for in a particular position.

2/ Drop resumes with companies I <u>would</u> work for in a particular position.

3/ If I have any resumes left at this point, I drop them with companies that I pray <u>do not</u> put me on their sign up sheet.

Fortunately, out of about 10 resume drops, my name was on six sign-up sheets. Now, I have to find an interview suit that a college student can afford. Since I was interviewing for relatively conservative positions, I chose the classic black suit and white blouse. The look of this suit does not fall short from being a nun's habit, but I fell for the norm anyway.

After six interviews, I received six "thanks - but no thanks" rejection letters -- four on the same day. Four rejections in one day is too much for anybody, but I tried again in the spring.

By spring, I was desperate. Four more months of school, then the unemployment line. So I dropped resumes for any and every company that had a resume out at the Career Center. Again, my name appeared on several sign-up sheets, but something had developed while I was dropping resumes -- my husband and I had decided to move to Alaska. So, I couldn't sign-up for a company unless they had the possibility of having a branch in Alaska. Of course, companies interviewing at The University of Alabama do not usually have an office in Alaska.

In other words, the last year I have spent in job searching has been in vain. I will be moving in May only to start the job search process again in Alaska. I am hoping there will be less rejection in Alaska.